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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PREF](#) [UNMIK](#) [VI](#)
SUBJECT: SALI BERISHA TELLS KOSOVO ALBANIANS TO RECONCILE
WITH SERBS

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Sensitive, But Unclassified, Please Protect Accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: During an emotional June 15-17 visit to Kosovo, Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha reiterated his support for Kosovo's independence, voiced his confidence in Kosovo's current leadership and asked Kosovo Albanians to reconcile with Serbs. He also attempted to mend fences with Kosovo opposition party leaders. In a meeting with Contact Group (CG) representatives, Berisha welcomed the CG's insistence that existing borders not be disturbed and commented that Belgrade's decentralization proposals look like a prelude to partition. Berisha's visit was well orchestrated and he was warmly received everywhere he went, especially in cities near his native town of Tropje, on Albania's border with Kosovo. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha made only his second ever official visit to Kosovo June 15-17. His previous visit was to attend the January 2006 funeral of Kosovo's late president Ibrahim Rugova. Berisha started his three-day visit by paying homage to Rugova, his longtime ally and friend. He referred to Rugova as "the founder of the free, European and independent Kosovo" and a "great man of the nation." His first day included meetings with various Kosovo government and international officials as well as speeches before the Kosovo Assembly and the municipal assembly of the city of Pristina, which made him an honorary resident. After his meetings with Kosovo government officials (including President Fatmir Sejdiu, Prime Minister Agim Ceku and Kosovo Assembly president Kole Berisha), Berisha said he and his government support Kosovo's independence and guarantees for the rights of Kosovo's minorities. He also expressed faith in the capacity of Kosovo's current leadership to achieve independence.

¶3. (U) In a speech at the Kosovo Assembly and in public appearances elsewhere, Berisha's key message to Kosovo Albanians was to forgive and reconcile with the Serbs. He told the Assembly in a televised address that "societal

reconciliation in Kosovo is in the vital national interest" of the Albanian nation and added that the attitude of Kosovo's Albanians towards its Serb minority is of great importance for relations between Serbs and Albanians throughout the Balkans. He said that forgiving does not mean forgetting, and stressed that reconciliation was the noblest way to honor the memory of loved ones lost in the conflict. On the second day of his visit he addressed the Fushe Kosove/Kosovo Polje municipal assembly and other community representatives in the same building in which Slobodan Milosevic made his famous 1987 speech assuring assembled Serbs that ethnic Albanians "would not beat them" any longer. Afterwards Berisha visited a local Serb orthodox church damaged in the March 2004 ethnic riots and promised to provide funds and technical assistance for its renovation.

¶ 14. (SBU) In addition to meeting with Kosovo government leaders and UNMIK chief Soren Jessen-Petersen, Berisha asked to meet with heads of liaison missions from Contact Group (CG) countries. He told local CG representatives he had advised Kosovo government leaders not to worry about the creation of "homogeneous communes," citing with approval the experience of Macedonia's mono-ethnic municipalities. Berisha also said that the Albanian government is very happy with the CG's principle of no changes in Kosovo's current borders. He noted that Belgrade's decentralization proposals look like a plan for partition. He added that Kosovo's independence will remove the necessity for Serbia to keep a large army and allow Serbia to demilitarize. Berisha believes a newly independent Montenegro should become a magnet for international assistance and that will help both Albania and Kosovo because most aid projects will be regional in nature. Berisha concluded by telling CG representatives he thought he could be helpful on such issues as decentralization, returns and human rights.

¶ 15. (U) During his visit Berisha also reached out to parties

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that grew out of the Kosovo Liberation Army, including Hashim Thaci's Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and Ramush Haradinaj's Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK). Berisha visited the memorial to the Jashari family in the village of Prekaz, and walked with Thaci through downtown Pristina to PDK party headquarters. He also had a cordial meeting with Haradinaj and the entire AAK presidency. (NOTE: Berisha has always been viewed as close to Rugova and his Democratic League of Kosovo party, and the PDK and AAK have traditionally had closer relations with Albanian socialist parties. END NOTE.).

¶ 16. (U) Berisha's visit turned emotional while he toured municipalities in western Kosovo that border on his own hometown of Tropje across the border in Albania. In Prizren, Gjakova and Peja thousands took to the streets, greeting him with cheers and performing Albanian folk dances in his honor.

During his brief stop in Gjakova, Berisha allowed that this was the most eagerly awaited day of his life because as a child growing up across the border 20 kilometers away in Albania, he had often tried to discern the city from the vantage of the Gjakova mountains that continue across the border into Albania. (NOTE: In June 2000, UNMIK refused to permit Berisha, then the controversial leader of the Albanian opposition, to enter Kosovo at the border crossing near Prizren on the grounds that his visit could be detrimental to the fragile security situation in Kosovo at the time. Berisha returned to the town of Kukes in Albania without reaching Kosovo. END NOTE).

¶ 17. (SBU) COMMENT: Berisha was welcomed in Kosovo as a leading ethnic Albanian politician, and his visit elicited feelings of genuine kinship from Kosovo Albanians. As a native of Albania's north, Berisha's nationalist politics and Albanian language are easily identifiable to Kosovars. For his part, Berisha said all the right things for Kosovars and internationals alike during the visit. The outpouring of

broad-based public support for him is an indication that
Albanian politics still transcends borders. END COMMENT.

¶8. (U) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable for release in
its entirety to U.N. Special Envoy for Kosovo Martti
Ahtisaari.

GOLDBERG